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FIFTH CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUTH, BUCHAREST, 27-29 APRIL 1998

Note by the Secretariat

The Conference secretariat has the honour to circulate to Conference partipants, as received and in the language of submission only, the attached report of the Fifth Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Youth, which was held from 27 to 29 May 1998 at Bucharest, Romania.

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5TH CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUTH

Bucharest, 27-29 April 1998

DRAFT REPORT

The Fifth Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth was held in Bucharest from 27 to 29 April 1998 at the invitation of the Romanian Government, which had made this proposal in Luxembourg at the informal meeting in May 1995.

All the Contracting Parties to the European Cultural Convention – with the exception of Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Liechtenstein, San Marino and Monaco, which had apologised for their absence – were represented. Canada attended as an observer.

The Committee of Ministers was represented by the Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Youth Affairs, the Parliamentary Assembly by the Vice-Chair and several members of the Sub-Committee on Youth and Sport of the Committee on Culture and Education and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe by a member of the Youth Sub-Group.

The conference was also attended by the Chairs of the Governing Board and the Advisory Committee of the European Youth Centres (EYCs) and European Youth Foundation (EYF).

The European Commission was represented by Mr Dibelius, Director at Directorate-General XXII, and Ms Fogg, the European Union representative in Romania.

UNESCO had sent two observers. The European Youth Forum was represented by its President and Vice-President accompanied by a delegation of thirty-five young people.

The full list of participants is reproduced in Appendix 1.

The theme of the conference was: "Young people: active citizens in a future Europe".

In his opening speech, the President of Romania, Mr Constantinescu, urged the participants to view young people as a current, not just a future, social force, capable of finding solutions to the problems facing them and, what was more, implementing those solutions, and not as a problem. He reminded the participants that it was important to see young people's participation in society as an indisputable right, and their inherent rights as an integral part of human rights while stressing the urgent need to combat social exclusion, by providing ever more young people with the means, motivation and capacity to build and drive "a train of hope" and a train of certainty" in a society that reflected the needs and aspirations of their generation.

The Secretary General, after thanking the Romanian authorities for organising the conference and the Youth Director for the services rendered to the Organisation, spoke of the difficulties facing young people today, while also making the point that the role of ministers responsible for youth was not an easy one given that their responsibilities outweighed their powers, which tended to be shared with other ministries such as education, labour or housing. The introduction of an integrated youth policy required broad intersectoral co-operation and a similar approach must be adopted at European level.

The Secretary General also stressed the need to involve young people in all areas affecting them, by encouraging participation. He referred here to the partnership pursued between youth organisations and governmental representatives in the context of the Council of Europe's youth activities. After reporting on the work done in this sector at both governmental and non-governmental level, he spoke about the prospects for the future and reminded the conference of the importance attached by the Second Summit of Heads of State and Government to education for citizenship, thus echoing the concerns of the ministers responsible for youth, who had chosen to focus their conference proceedings on the subject of active youth participation in the process of European integration.

On a proposal by France, Mr Crin Antonescu, the Romanian Minister responsible for Youth and Sport, was elected Chair of the conference. The Luxembourgeois and Greek Ministers, Mr Alex Bodry and Mr Ioanis Antiopoulos, nominated by Hungary and Slovenia respectively, were elected Vice-Chairs.

At the request of Portugal, an item was added to the agenda (Appendix 2) on the World Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, due to be held in Lisbon in August of that year.

During the opening session, the conference heard speeches by Mr Taurantas, the Lithuanian Ambassador to the Council of Europe and Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Youth Affairs, Ms Plechata, member of the Czech parliamentary delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee on Youth and Sport and Mr Venturini, member of the Youth Sub-Group of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe. The speakers outlined the activities pursued in the youth field in their respective areas of responsibility and underlined the importance of co-management, a novel and unique way of involving young people in the decision-making process in the Council of Europe's youth sector. In the wake of the changes which had occurred in central and eastern Europe, they emphasised how important it was for young people in that part of Europe to have access to EYC/EYF activities in order to develop democratic, pluralist youth structures.

Mr Taurantas and Ms Plechata further spoke of the need to adapt youth structures to Europe's changing society by making them more flexible and accessible to new partners. Finally, Ms Plechata raised the issue of youth sector funding, and in particular the funding of the European Youth Foundation. She said that in order for the sector to function more effectively, such a problem must be resolved and proposed that contributions to the Foundation be made compulsory in future.

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Mr Bodry, the Luxembourgeois Minister responsible for Youth and Vice-Chairperson of the conference, began his account of the plenary session of 27 April with an appraisal of the work done by the Council of Europe's youth sector since the Vienna Conference and the informal meeting in Luxembourg. He presented an overview of the results achieved and the progress made at governmental level in the areas of youth mobility, participation and information and confirmed the growth in EYC/EYF activities, particularly following the enlargement of the Council of Europe. He noted in passing that the activities pursued by the governmental sector and by the non-governmental sector had themes in common. This reflected the interaction which existed between the two sectors.

He stressed the need to continue with the efforts to increase youth mobility in Europe and urged the representatives of states wishing to sign the Convention on Transnational Long-Term Voluntary Service to take the necessary steps to carry this project through and so lend fresh impetus to voluntary service in Europe. He also noted the importance of continuing to review national youth policies in order to take stock of any developments therein and of introducing comprehensive, integrated youth policies in order to define the common principles of a comprehensive, integrated European youth policy. However, he stressed that this exercise, to be efficient, should pinpoint the positive as well as the negative effects of the projects carried out in this field.

The minister concluded his speech by referring to the future development of the sector, which must adapt to the new realities of youth work and provide alternative responses to young people's expectations, in such a way as to marry the Council of Europe's objectives and priorities as defined by the Second Summit with the achievements of the intergovernmental sector and the priority themes of the work done in the European Youth Centres and European Youth Foundation. The Final Declaration of this conference established working objectives for the intergovernmental sector which echoed these concerns, namely youth participation and active democratic citizenship, non-formal education and integration into society and enhanced social cohesion.

He recommended firstly that these objectives be addressed within the framework of a closer partnership between everyone involved in the youth sector in order to develop, as far as possible, comprehensive projects, and secondly that a fully-fledged intersectoral youth policy be instituted within the Council of Europe, under the auspices of the Youth Directorate, in order to develop a European model for a comprehensive, integrated policy. This intersectoral approach should also be accompanied by greater co-operation with other international intergovernmental organisations, particularly the European Union, and, to this end, he suggested setting up a youth observatory, as a joint structure shared by the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Mr Antonescu, the Romanian Minister responsible for Youth and Sport, introduced the draft Final Declaration, the text of which is attached to this report, submitted to the conference for adoption and presented the proceedings of the Conference.

The discussions were then initiated by Mr Anthopoulos, the Greek Deputy Minister of Education and Vice-Chair of the conference, who said that, in the current state of crisis, young people constituted the most vulnerable group; hence the urgent need to find suitable ways of integrating them into society and encouraging them to participate in community life as active citizens. To this end, he proposed implementing integrated youth policies which would pave the way for equal opportunities and developing, at every level, youth participation structures which would treat them as full partners in the decision-making process.

He stressed the importance, in this context, of developing regional co-operation, based on common interests, conducive to the development of such policies. These regional co-operation arrangements could be reviewed within the Council of Europe in order to assess the progress made and identify common courses of action. He informed the conference that in March his country had hosted the Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth in the Countries of South-Eastern Europe. The minister then concluded his speech with an offer from the Government of Greece to host the 6th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth in due time.

During the discussions, many speakers emphasised the need to encourage participation in all its forms and said that the fight against youth unemployment and social exclusion and the search for solutions within the framework of intersectoral policies were matters of priority. The representatives of some countries, such as Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Cyprus or Slovenia, pointed out that they had followed the Council of Europe's example and set up co-management structures in an effort to involve young people and their organisations in youth policy-making. Other countries, such as Switzerland and France, were encouraging the growth of various youth participation structures (eg youth parliaments, permanent youth council) or, like Bulgaria, seeking to promote the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life (Llangollen Charter) or, like Croatia, providing aid to encourage the participation of organisations representing young people from minority groups or young disabled people.

Still other delegates, such as Mr Kivistö (Finland) or Mr Ostini, representative of the "Education for Citizenship" Project Group of the Cultural Co-operation Council, felt that education for citizenship was a way of fostering participation and that it was important to develop this activity within the Council of Europe as part of an intersectoral approach. Mr Mignon, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly, presented his project on the setting-up of a Youth Parliamentary Assembly for the 50th Anniversary of the Council of Europe.

The Hungarian State Secretary, Mr Goncz, underlined the importance of genuine participation, where young people were not simply passive observers. Similarly, Mr Tschudi, a member of the Basel Regierungsrat, pointed out that while participation had been on the agenda since the first ministerial conference – and while welcoming the pioneering role which the Council of Europe had played in this area – it was a long and complex process which needed to be constantly assessed and reviewed in the light of changes in the situation of young people. This opinion was shared by Ms Buffet, the French Minister responsible for Youth and Sport, who said that in order for there to be any kind of youth participation and involvement in civic life, one must first recognise the uniqueness of young people's chosen

paths in life, their identities and their right to participate in society. Mr Bryntesson (Sweden) expressed the wish that the Youth Directorate should continue its work in the field of youth participation, which was the cornerstone of its policy. The chairpersons of the Governing Board and the Advisory Committee of the European Youth Centres and the European Youth Foundation regretted that, on one hand, the Final Declaration of the Conference did not insist on the need to maintain and reinforce the co-management within the Youth Directorate, and that on the other hand it was not given the necessary and adequate budgetary resources for a satisfactory implementation of its programmes.

Youth unemployment and social exclusion were another focal point of the discussions. The representatives of Switzerland, Italy, the Holy See and Estonia drew attention to this worrying problem which affected a growing number of young people in Europe's societies and the need to find solutions within the context of intersectoral youth policies. The Slovenian Minister, Mr Gaber, raised this issue in his speech, saying that social exclusion was not something which was confined to young people who had failed their exams and joined the ranks of the unemployed, but that it also affected the poor, the homeless, migrants, refugees, members of the various minorities and disabled people. In his view, the solution lay not just in improving and adapting education, but also in acknowledging the skills acquired from non-formal education, which helped to make young people more employable. He welcomed, furthermore, the moves made by the Council of Europe towards developing an intersectoral, co-operative approach to these issues, because a problem as complex as social exclusion among young people could not be tackled through youth policy alone.

Many speakers likewise took the view that active youth participation was a way of combating exclusion. Ms Holzer (Austria) also suggested developing other projects such as the mediation, as a means of dealing with various types of conflict, eg conflicts at school, within families, between different ethnic groups or involving young offenders, etc, while suggesting various approaches – peer group education, conflict management, mediation – which could be encouraged at both national and European level. For the Estonian Minister of Youth, Mr Klaassen, exclusion was also very often aggravated by the lack of information, and that it was urgent to help young people to acceed to information, in particular to new technologies and to acquire the necessary competences in order to use them in a good way.

Like the Estonian Minister, Ms Buffet stressed the need to attach greater importance to non-formal education and in particular to any experience acquired through associative life, and to acknowledge this experience (as a component of education in its own right) in school education or vocational training. Against this background, she also emphasised the importance of promoting young people's rights, such as the right to express one's views, the right to information, education and training, and social rights such as access to healthcare or housing, which required an intersectoral approach. Ms Novikova, Chairperson of the State Committee on Youth of the Russian Federation also informed the participants of the drafting of a bill on youth, some provisions of which should be devoted to the protection of youth rights. The Italian representative spoke on this subject, expressing support for the idea of compiling catalogues of young people's rights at both national and European level.

The participants in the discussion also spoke about the need to continue working in areas such as the fight against racism (Germany, Italy, Cyprus), access to information and new technologies (Finland, France, Switzerland) and the development of voluntary service (Ukraine, Switzerland). On this last point, some speakers expressed regret at the fact that the

Convention on Transnational Long-Term Voluntary Service had not been opened for signature at the conference and urged their colleagues to take the necessary steps to bring this project to a successful conclusion. The Chairperson of the State Committee on Youth of the Russian Federation also stressed the necessity to encourage youth mobility in Europe, which is essential for the promotion of international co-operation in the youth field.

Another point which attracted the participants' attention was regional co-operation. In addition to the Greek initiative, the Swedish representative informed the participants about the Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth in the Baltic Regions, while the Azerbaijani representative told them about the formation of a club of ministers responsible for youth in the former Soviet republics. The Swiss representative expressed support for the idea of developing the network of decentralised centres as recommended by the Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth in Vienna in 1993. In this context, the ministers of the three Caucasian states undertook, in a signed declaration (Appendix 3), to set up a Transcaucasian youth centre which would operate along the lines of the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest.

The assessment of national policies, as it has begun at the Youth Directorate, was felt by many speakers to be an extremely useful method of sharing experience on a routine basis and defining European standards for a comprehensive, integrated youth policy. They expressed the wish that it should continue and be developed further and encouraged countries which had not yet tried it to do so. On this matter, the representative of the Russian Federation informed the participants that her country was ready to be involved in this process.

Finally, the necessity to develop and reinforce the co-operation of the youth sector with other intergovernmental international organisations, especially with the European Union, was recognised as essential and necessary in order to improve synergies, with the hope of harmonising the objectives. This matter was raised by the UNESCO representative, who said that the priorities defined in the Final Declaration were akin to those of her own organisation and that she hoped to see a concrete proposal for co-operation geared to common objectives before long. The representative of the Commission of the European Communities, Mr Dibelius, after outlining the projects already run in association with the Youth Directorate, in particular the training schemes, raised the possibility of further co-operation in areas such as youth mobility or information. He also underlined the interest taken by the Commission in the draft Convention on Transnational Long-Term Voluntary Service, which could help resolve some of the legal and administrative problems encountered by the Commission in setting up its own voluntary service project.

Finally, Mr Antonescu pinpointed the items corresponding to priorities of a global and integrated youth policy, such as participation, education to citizenship, the recognition of the competences acquired through non-formal education, information, mobility, the fight against racism, youth rights promotion, and stressed a number of proposals for action:

- lower the age at which young people may vote: collect and publish, on a regular basis, national statistics on the number of young members of local, regional and national parliaments (Slovenia)

- develop youth participation structures designed to involve as many young people as possible (France)

- provide training for young people and civil servants working in youth participation structures (Lithuania)

- promote experiments in the field of education for citizenship and, to this end, institute a Council of Europe award for innovative "civic education projects", which would be listed in a data bank administered by the Youth Directorate and accessible via the Internet (Finland)

- compile catalogues of young people's rights at national and European level (Italy)

- introduce pilot projects to field-test intersectoral working procedures with a view to introducing comprehensive, integrated youth policies (Finland)

- assess knowledge, skills and experience acquired from non-formal education and ensure that these achievements receive due credit in the education system and labour markets (Finland, France)

- look at how the standards established by the Council of Europe in the field of youth policy are applied in national policies (Hungary).

The minister concluded his intervention, hoping that all these proposals could be examined carefully at European and national levels.

The Conference continued with three round tables on the following themes "participation, democracy and civil society", "solidarity, fight against social exclusion" and "Human rights, youth rights" which completed the debate held in plenary session.

During the closing session, participants heard the conclusions of these round tables, presented respectively by Mr Balavoine (France), Bryntesson (Sweden) and Taliadoros (Cyprus). The Conference then adopted unanimously the draft Final Declaration presented by the Chairman of the Conference. This Declaration and the conclusions of the round tables are appended to the present report. On proposal the chairmanship, the Conference decided to send this declaration to the Baltic Sea Youth Minister Conference which will be held in Visby (Sweden) on 5 and 6 June 1998 and to the World Youth Minister Conference which will be held in Lisbon from 8 to 12 August 1998. The participants were informed by Mr Fontes, Youth Secretary of State of Portugal on the state of preparation of this event organised jointly by the Portuguese Government and the UN.

During his closing speech, Mr Antonescu expressed his satisfaction for the fruitful and positive results of the conference and recalled all the proposals which should encourage the implementation of global and integrated youth policies at European and national levels. However, he regretted that it had not been the occasion to launch a Charter on youth rights, and hoped that this project could be realised for the next Conference. He thanked the Greek authorities for their invitation to organise the conference in Athens in four years time.

All the participants warmly thanked the Romanian authorities and the staff of the Ministry of Youth and Sport for the organisation of the Conference. Finally, they thanked the Youth Director, for whom it was the last participation at a conference due to his retirement, for the services given to the youth policy in Europe.

A youth event was held at the conference venue, organised jointly by the European Youth Forum and the Romanian youth organisations, showing in particular an exhibition on youth orga nisations' achievements.